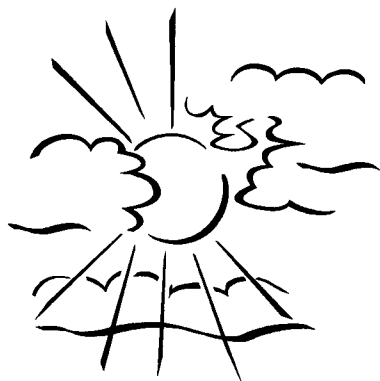


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Foster Care	2-4
*Child Abuse/ Neglect/Protection	5-12
Health Care	13-14
Food Assistance	15
Early Childhood Development	16-17
Adoption	18
Juvenile Justice	19
Domestic Violence	20-21
Sexual Assault	22-23
Unger Case	24
Fraud	25
*Welfare Reform	26

Reunification is goal of foster program

By AUDORA BURG

Journal Correspondent

EDITOR's NOTE: This is the first installment in a two-part series on foster care. Part 2 will appear in Tuesday's Journal.

The baby drank his bottle, cuddled in his foster mother's arms, in the St. Joseph County probate court room.

He was blissfully unaware of the legal wrangling around him. Present to discuss his future were the judge, his foster parents, his birth mother, and three attorneys - one for him, one for the Department of Human Services, and one for the birth mother.

The baby has been in foster care since his birth five months ago. He is one of five children to have been born to the mother. This court was only dealing with him; his four older siblings live in another state. Those courts had already assigned permanent guardianship of the four away from this mother.

After the hearing, the child's attorney came over to coo at him. The birth mother left the courtroom without even a glance at the baby, although the foster mother said the birth mother had seen him that morning before the hearing.

She would also have a chance to see him before she returned to her out-of-state home. There would be a supervised visitation at DHS that afternoon. The birth mother comes to see him every two to three weeks, the foster mother said.

Reunification is the goal

This baby is currently a temporary ward of the state. In Michigan, children can be temporary wards for 364 days, "then you have to do something," said Fred Reynolds, a DHS caseworker.

That something is either reunification of the child with his family, or to move toward the termination of parental rights.

"Our goal is reunification, it is not termination," said Kathy Lake, Children's Foster Care Supervisor at DHS in Centreville. They currently have 174 foster care cases, with 52 of those receiving adoption services, she said. "These numbers do not reflect that slightly under a third of the children we receive into care have their parental rights terminated," she said.

In general, the majority of the cases begin with a plan for reunification of child with parent, and the majority does end with reunification, she said. They do get re-referrals, but not many.

The easiest cases are those that are clear-cut from the beginning, Lake said. Cases where the parents don't show up for visitations or continue to test positive in drug screens (over half of their cases are drug-involved), or on the other end, where it's clear the parents are working hard to get their act together, she said.

Safety is the word

The troubling cases are those where the parents are not consistent. They do okay for awhile then they slip. "Those are the ones, do you terminate or give them another three months?" she said.

"Safety — that's the key word," Lake said. "Here we take our time. We ask ourselves, 'Is it enough? Did I make the right decision?'"

Caseworkers at DHS said St. Joseph County Probate Court Judge Thomas Shumaker is cautious and doesn't tend to send kids back home unless "we have a pretty good sense the kids are going to make it," one said.

There is a 4-month "Family Reunification Program" to help families make it. A social worker and therapist work to reincorporate the child with his family.

There are only four FRP slots available in St. Joseph County, so sometimes the return home is delayed until there is an opening. Although, some families are able to be reunited without needing the program, a caseworker said.

One child who will need the FRP services is a 2-year-old, who has been in the care of relatives for more than a year. This case exceeded the 364-day mark, but because the mother was making progress, the judge granted a 3-month extension before making a final decision about the child's placement. But the time had come to do something.

The clock's ticking

"Children cannot wait," Lake said. "While you (the parent) are trying to get your act together, they're growing up."

At the hearing, Shumaker told the child's mother, "My job in this case is to measure substantial risk to the child," and also to be sure the mother met the minimum standard. "You're close to that, don't get me wrong, but we have services to help narrow that gap," he said.

After the hearing, the birth mother, foster mother, and DHS caseworker remained in the courtroom, discussing how to work together to help the child.

"I've had her (the child) for awhile," the foster mother said to the DHS worker. "Yeah, I'm attached, but I've always known she would go home to her mother eventually - and I'm happy to see she's (mother's) getting to that point."

Time's up

If the statutory clock runs out and the child is not going home, then the child becomes a permanent ward of the state and is referred for adoption planning and placement.

Children under 13 are adoptable; children 14 years and older may choose to be placed for adoption. They may also decide to remain under the court's supervision until age 19 or they graduate from high school, whichever happens first.

In the interim, the superintendent of the Michigan Children's Institute becomes the child's legal parent. The DHS office is the local representative for the state.

When children become permanent wards of the state, caseworkers pinpoint the problems and look for what is in the child's best interest, said Laima Patton, an adoption and foster care worker at DHS.

"We consider their history and their current needs and ask who can best meet those needs rather than cook up an adoption really fast," she said. "The right of the child has to come first, and one of those rights is to have a family - if that's possible," she said.

"Society needs kids to get their problems worked out in three months," but that's not realistic, said caseworker Chuck Zuke.

Financial pressures - DHS

At full staff, DHS in St. Joseph County employs six foster care workers and two adoption workers. Those numbers were lower last summer. Between a hiring freeze and workers out on medical leave, the normal caseload of 20 cases for each worker ballooned to almost 50 cases each.

"We can't say, 'I'm sorry, we're full, take these children back home,'" caseworker Linda Skipski said. "Foster care is taken seriously by our leaders, but not for funding purposes," she said.

Visitation, DHS-style

An hour after the hearing for the 5-month-old concluded, the birth mother walked in to DHS for the supervised visitation. She chose a parenting magazine from the rack.

The foster mother entered a few minutes later, carrying the baby in his infant seat. The birth mother barely looked up.

The foster mother sat two seats apart from the birth mother. The foster mother took the baby out of the carrier and held him, talking to him and playing with him.

During the more than 45-minute wait for the visitation to begin, the birth mother alternately paged through the magazine and looked around. She occasionally smiled at the baby, making little noises to the child.

She otherwise spoke very little, but she did ask the foster mother a question: how were her flowers doing?

Police probe baby's death; homicide ruled

By: Ray Kisonas story updated April 25, 2006 11:23AM

The death of a Monroe baby girl has been ruled a homicide and police say they are actively pursuing the case.

Monroe County Medical Examiner Dr. Carl Schmidt said on Monday that Gracie A. Simmons, 17 months, died of head trauma.

"She suffered multiple blows to the head," Dr. Schmidt said.

Monroe police detectives have conducted several interviews in their investigation, said Cpl. Brett Ansel. No arrests have been made. However, that could change soon, he said.

"We intend to have this resolved in a short period of time," he said. "We're moving forward."

The baby died Thursday after suffering massive head injuries that proved to be fatal. Neither Dr. Schmidt nor police would elaborate as to what might have caused the injuries. An autopsy was performed and test results are pending.

Cpl. Ansel said he and other investigators have interviewed several people in connection with the case. He is expecting to interview the father's girlfriend, Sonya Moussaed, today.

"We are more than interested to speak with the last people who were with Gracie when she was last alive," Cpl. Ansel said.

Cpl. Ansel said Ms. Moussaed was home alone with Gracie Wednesday night while the baby's father, Joseph A. Simmons, was at work.

According to police reports, he arrived at his home in the 800 block of Hubble St. about 7:30 a.m. Thursday after working the midnight shift and went to bed. Ms. Moussaed, who lives in the house, then reportedly brought the child to him and told him she was not responding. Ms. Moussaed then called 911. It was about 9:30 a.m.

"She's not breathing ... She's cold," the caller, who identified herself as "Moussaed," said to a 911 dispatcher, according to a Monroe County Central Dispatch tape obtained by The Evening News after a Freedom of Information Act request.

The conversation between the dispatcher and the woman was calm. The caller's voice was shaky but not frantic.

Police said a previous assault incident involving the child was reported last July. They declined to elaborate.

When the 911 call was completed, emergency crews rushed Gracie to the hospital, where she was later pronounced dead. The funeral was held Monday. The Rev. Stephen Rooney, pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church in Monroe, said during such difficult circumstances, faith and family are the only means to console the grieving.

Father Rooney, who officiated during the services, said he was worried about the father and mother, Holly Preston.

"My concern is for the welfare of the parents," he said. "Anybody who loses a child suffers an incredibly painful experience. They're a young couple whose hearts were broken and lives have been shattered."

At least 60 vehicles were in the funeral procession. Father Rooney said that in addition to the grief, mourners were having a considerably difficult time coming to terms with how Gracie died.

"With the death of a baby there is tremendous loss and sadness," he said. "People are just bewildered."

Father Rooney said he offered support and reiterated the comfort of faith.

"God never deserts," he said. "God is right beside the child."

Bad Axe parents arrested, charged with child abuse

By: STACY LANGLEY, Tribune Staff Writer

04/24/2006

February with serious head injuries were arrested and arraigned in Huron County District Court on Friday morning on felony first degree child abuse charges.

Ryan Scott Welshans, 24, and his wife, Stardust Lynn Welshans, 23, were laughing and joking Friday morning about their activities earlier in the week as they sat inside the court room waiting to hear what kind of bond would be imposed for their release from jail.

During the court proceedings, Huron County District Court Judge Karl E. Kraus appointed David B. Herrington to represent Ryan Welshans. James Woodworth was appointed to represent Stardust Welshans in the case.

Woodworth, who was too ill to speak at length in court, asked attorney Dawn Schumacher to speak on his behalf since Schumacher is familiar with the case.

She currently represents Stardust Welshans in the Probate Court proceeding in which the **Department of Human Services** is seeking termination of parental rights of both parents. Ryan Welshans will be represented by attorney E. Duane Cubitt during the termination hearing. The child abuse charges authorized by Huron County Prosecuting Attorney Mark J. Gaertner point the finger at the couple. Gaertner claims they knowingly or intentionally caused serious harm to their 1-month-old baby boy during the time period of Feb. 3-4.

"They've been accused of a serious allegation involving their child and they have a cavalier, almost jovial, attitude," Gaertner said about the behavior of the parents in court.

When officials at the Huron County **Department of Human Services** became aware of the birth of the baby on Jan. 9, a hearing was scheduled to determine placement of the newborn. At that time, it was determined by the probate court that Ryan Welshans had made progress in the efforts set forth for him by the court and DHS and that the newborn could go home to live. During that hearing, Welshans was ordered by the court to keep his estranged wife away from the child. But the investigation by Huron County Sheriff's detectives reveals Ryan Welshans allowed Stardust Welshans into the apartment located north of Bad Axe the weekend the child was injured.

After the baby was injured, an emergency hearing in probate court took place in early March. It was determined that Ryan Welshans violated the court order and allowed Stardust into his apartment. It also was during the March hearing that Huron County Probate Court Judge David L. Clabuesch ruled Ryan and Stardust Welshans are not to have any contact with any children until a hearing can take place to determine if their parental rights should be terminated. That hearing is scheduled to get underway at 9 a.m. Monday.

Gaertner said, however, with the recent filing of the criminal charges that "there is a possibility" the termination hearing will be put on hold until the criminal case makes its way through the court system because the couple could be called to testify in the termination hearing which could then be used against them in the criminal proceeding.

Authorities were alerted of the baby's injuries on Feb. 5 when a Bad Axe police officer responded to Ryan Welshans' apartment after he called 9-1-1 reporting the baby was having difficulty breathing.

The baby was taken first to Huron Medical Center then transported to Hurley Medical Center in Flint where he remained in critical condition for several days, being treated for a fractured skull, rib fractures, clavicle fractures and other injuries.

Investigators are not yet releasing details on exactly how they believe the baby sustained his head injuries.

"These are difficult cases - remember our best witness is a baby who can't testify so we have to prove this case and cases like this by way of physical evidence, medical records, and statements the parents have given to investigators," said Gaertner.

"Statements were given on five different occasions by the parents to police. This case has taken a lot of time on the part of the (Huron County sheriff's) investigators interviewing, re-interviewing, conferring with me, re-interviewing, and at the same time we have been on track with the juvenile case. One track is to ensure the safety of the child and make sure he doesn't go back to his parents. The other is the criminal track to make sure they are held accountable for the allegations."

Gaertner said he is concerned about Ryan Welshans' release since he is currently on the sex offender registry list for a conviction outside of Huron County. He also added that both Stardust and Ryan Welshans have extensive contact with law enforcement, which includes assaultive behavior on other family members - and each other - characterizing them as having volatile tempers.

On Friday, both the Welshans' attorneys were present for the bond hearing, arguing each of their clients should be allowed a reasonable bond since they've been questioned multiple times by police and have appeared for each scheduled court date regarding the abuse allegations.

Kraus said in his past experiences with the Welshans, they are extremely difficult to deal with.

"They don't listen to anybody, they don't do what anyone tells them to do, and they don't do what I order them to do," said Kraus. "But at this point in the proceedings, the presumption of innocence is paramount in my opinion. The fact the parental rights case has been pending and the investigation has been pending indicates to me that the possibility of flight is minimal."

Kraus entered a pretrial release order, setting a \$2,500 personal recognizance bond with standard bond conditions and additional conditions which include that they may not engage in assaultive behavior and must cooperate fully with council. They also must follow directions of (Huron County Public Guardian) Carol Henny, who is required to report to the district court assuring a suitable place for the couple has been established for them to live since they recently moved out of their apartment.

As of press time Saturday evening, both Ryan and Stardust Welshans remained lodged in the Huron County Jail.

The couple is scheduled to appear for a preliminary examination in the criminal case at 8:30 a.m. May 4 in Huron County District Court.

According to Gaertner, the baby is continuing to show progress. The baby and his 1-year-old brother continue to live with foster parents here in Huron County.

The criminal charge the couple faces carries a possible sentence of up to 15 years in prison.

Parents sue over tot's fall from window

Web-posted Apr 25, 2006

By KORIE WILKINS
Of The Oakland Press

SOUTHFIELD - The parents of a baby boy who died after falling out a window in a Southfield apartment complex have filed a \$50 million wrongful death lawsuit, saying the building is dangerous and in disrepair.

Police say 16-month-old Saviour God-Scientific Allah was in the seventh-floor apartment with his parents and siblings when he fell last week. Detective John Harris of the Southfield Police Department said charges will not be filed against the parents, Jennifer Holmes and Andrew Pitts.

"Our preliminary investigation has led us to believe this was an accidental death," Harris said.

On Monday, Holmes and Pitts met with the media - and their Farmington Hills attorney Arnold Reed - to discuss the case and the death of their little boy.

"They are loving parents, and they loved Saviour," Reed said. "There should not have been a rush to judge these people. They did nothing wrong."

Holmes, 30, and Pitts, 26, have been together for 10 years and have four children. They own a small business and had been in the apartment at North Park Place for only a month. Holmes said she had complained to management numerous times about the faulty windows, loose screens and a leak in her kitchen but to no avail.

And while both Pitts and Holmes acknowledge that a lawsuit - which was filed Monday in Oakland County Circuit Court against Bluerock Management, Inc. - won't bring back Saviour, they hope to prevent other parents from such a horrible loss.

"He was fun-loving and energetic and was just starting to develop his own personality," she said. "I loved him so much. He was my baby."

Patricia Anderson, director of operations for Bluerock Management, the company that runs North Park Place apartments, did not return calls seeking comment.

In the lawsuit, Holmes and Pitts allege that the complex failed to properly maintain the apartment's windows and screens and should have known that they were unsafe.

"Right now, I can't even think about any anger because of the loss," Pitts said. "I look at my baby as being my almighty, my lord and savior. I want my son back. Anger ain't going to bring him back."

Pitts and Holmes say they were both in the apartment the day Savior fell and were cooking breakfast for the boy. According to police, Savior was playing in a bedroom with a sibling when the girl noticed the screen was loose. She and another sibling went to tell a parent. In the meantime, Saviour climbed up on the window and fell.

Police and medical personnel were called to the apartment complex, south of West Nine Mile and west of Greenfield roads, on Thursday morning.

Several residents have complained in recent days about the faulty windows and loose screens and said management has been unresponsive to their concerns.

Harris said there have been several children who have fallen from the windows of high-rise apartment buildings in the city over the past decade. He said to his knowledge, this was the first fatal fall in years.

A similar incident happened nearby in June 2002. A 5-year-old girl fell out an eighth-story window at the Charter House Apartments - less than a mile away - in the 16000 block of West Nine Mile Road. The girl survived without any broken bones, since a recent rainfall helped soften the ground. At the time, officials said the girl was near a window when the screen came loose. The girl was home with a grandparent.

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

Oakland Briefs

Delores Patterson / The Detroit News

\$50 million suit filed over baby's fall, death

Attorney Arnold Reed of Farmington Hills filed a \$50 million lawsuit Monday in Oakland Circuit Court on behalf of the parents of 16-month-old Saviour God Scientific Allah who died Thursday when he fell from a seventh-story apartment window in Southfield. The lawsuit, which will be heard by Judge John J. McDonald, accuses the North Park Place Apartment of negligence, wrongful death and causing emotional distress. Reed said the child's parents', Jennifer Holmes and Andrew Pitts, had complained about the window screen, lack of locks on the balcony door and faulty window latches. The suit says the complaints went unanswered. Apartment officials could not be reached for comment. A hearing date has not been set.

Gov. Granholm: Health care needs to be statewide initiative

Cadillac News

April 25, 2006

This is the final part of a series of questions the Cadillac News posed to Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm during a visit to the Cadillac News on April 13.

What can the state do to help businesses with health care costs?

What we need to do, and this is one of the things I've asked the federal government to do, is sort of a Massachusetts-like



Jennifer Granholm

health care. We're using the same consultants as they did in Massachusetts, we've asked for a waiver like they did in Massachusetts, and what we want to do is to provide health care for low-wage workers and make sure that businesses who don't have the ability to provide health care because it's so uncompetitive, that they can buy into this system and have it more of a shared responsibility.

We would draw down, it would be \$1 billion we would draw down, to be able to offer sort of a no-frills benefit package with cost sharing, so the employee might pay a little bit, the state and the feds pay a little bit, and if the employer wants to offer it as a benefit, then perhaps he or she can pick up the employee's piece of it. But it's much lower than having to pick up the whole tab.

It's the new model of health care - they need to do this on the federal level. Frankly, I mean they need to offer at least pooling of catastrophic coverage because it's not right that more cars were built in Ontario last year than in Michigan because of health care. It's that cost of labor and

health care that has really hurt us. We can compete, since the labor aspect of things in a highly industrialized, high-end manufacturing, it's not that big of a differential, if you look at the overall health care and legacy costs of a bigger company.

I was at the National Governor's Association meeting in February and the chairman of Wal-Mart, Lee Scott, comes to the NGA - the head of the NGA is the governor of Arkansas, so he invited the Wal-Mart president to come - and he says to all of us governors: "You know what we need, we need a national health-care solution because Wal-Mart is finding it difficult to compete in this global economy because we have to provide health care and other countries don't."

If Wal-Mart is saying that, you know our manufacturers have been saying that, they've all been saying that - Rick Waggoner, Bill Ford; the issue is very strong - we need an assist with health care. We're going to try and do what we can on the state level obviously. But really, I think the next presidential election, this has become less of a moral issue than a competitive issue; I mean it's a moral issue too, but it's a competitiveness issue also. I think the next presidential candidates will be talking about the issue of trade, health care and pensions.

Cadillac News: Who is the plan open to?

Granholtz: The way we initially proposed it is for people who are 200 percent poverty and below, so lower wage workers and the businesses that employ them. But in this negotiation process with the feds. We may move to a system like what Massachusetts did, which is a health-care mandate, and required everybody to buy in. You have to get the buy-in of the legislature on it. The proposal that we made, because it's not a mandate, we are more likely to get the buy in this legislature.

I'm hopeful that now that Massachusetts has passed it and the governor of Massachusetts, who is of course related to Michigan and they bring him in all the time, with that as a backdrop maybe they would be open to what has been done in Massachusetts.

The bottom line is we have to do something different and now the feds seem willing to look at other models and allow the states to be the laboratories of innovation.

news@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)

Five pantries to give food away May 2

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

Muskegon Chronicle

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Five area food pantries will distribute 7,500 pounds of fresh fruit, vegetables and other food May 2 at St. Patrick's Church, 901 Columbus, Grand Haven.

The event starts 10 a.m. and the food is free for those in need. The food is provided by the Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan and Love INC.

Visitors are asked to bring their own grocery bags.

Another distribution is scheduled 10 a.m. May 23 at the church.

For information, call Love INC at (616) 846-2701.

Early childhood programs earn economic payoff and other dividends

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Sunday, April 23, 2006

By Sharon Claytor Peters
JOURNAL READER

As we work to ensure that Michigan's children are prepared to succeed in the 21st century marketplace, we need to start at the very beginning - the crucial developmental years between birth and age 5.

The value of preschool at age 3 and 4 is already recognized widely, but the years before then are equally important. More than three-fourths of our brain's initial development - the cognitive "wiring" needed for language, memory and reasoning - takes place by age 3, numerous studies show.

So, we miss a big opportunity to accomplish groundwork for lifelong learning if we let children languish until the age of 5 or even 4.

As the president of Michigan's Children, a nonprofit resource and advocacy group, I welcome attention to early childhood from the Michigan Legislative Children's Caucus and the Michigan Legislative Black Caucus. Both caucuses have recognized that high-quality early childhood programs, especially for low-income families, are an essential priority for private and public investment - particularly as Michigan responds to an economic transition.

To prepare students for the more rigorous standards of our newly strengthened high school curriculum, we have to start at least a dozen years earlier. Gov. Jennifer Granholm promised recently in this year's State of the State address, "We will give all of our children the education they need to succeed in the 21st century economy." Upholding that pledge means beginning before kindergarten for families that will benefit from extra support.

This is a business and economic issue as much as an educational one. It affects working parents, which affects the workplace. And, even more importantly, it affects the life chances of our youngest neighbors and the quality of our future work force.

High quality child care and effective programs help moms and dads learn more about the little things that make a huge difference in how children develop. Those

programs might include nurses and paraprofessionals who visit the home to teach that parenting involves interaction, as well as nutrition, diaper changes and a safe spot for babies to rest or rock by themselves.

Participants learn to stimulate intellectual development, curiosity and awareness through eye contact with a baby, holding it, reading aloud and playing music. Those with toddlers learn to provide puzzles, books and art materials. Services also can include transportation to quality child care that includes pre-kindergarten education.

Kindergartners well-equipped to learn are much more likely to succeed in school and continue on to post-secondary education. This is why James J. Heckman, a Nobel Prize-winning economist at the University of Chicago, says that of all education spending, we gain the highest rate of return from early childhood development programs for at-risk families.

"The gains from such investment can be quantified - and they are large," the professor wrote this year in *The Wall Street Journal*. Heckman and other economists point to lower dropout rates, lower crime rates, lower job training costs, a higher-skilled work force, higher earnings, higher rates of home ownership and higher income tax revenues.

Here in Michigan, it's heartening that this issue is about to gain wider attention when the bipartisan Children's Caucus of state legislators introduces early childhood development initiatives. Those proposals will deserve support from employers, educators and everyone else who recognizes the value of investing in new generations of confident, productive, well-prepared Michigan students, workers and parents.

Sharon Claytor Peters is president and CEO of Michigan's Children, an independent advocacy organization for children and their families. She is a member of the governor's Council for Labor and Economic Growth and is a past president of the Lansing School District Board of Education.

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

A child is waiting

Sensitive Heather has potential

Rosemary Dorr / Special to The Detroit News

All smiles, 12-year-old Heather is excited about being in the paper and maybe, she hopes, getting a family.

A survivor of hard times and many hurts, Heather is a sensitive child, but also friendly and talkative. "I like to play basketball for fun," she says. "I like art. I like hanging around with friends that are positive. I like dogs. I like skateboarding and going to the park."

Heather likes to read poetry, too, but admits honestly, "I don't like school. Sometimes the work is too hard." Considered learning disabled, she attends special education classes and is learning coping skills.

She has goals, too. Says Heather quietly, "My temper, aggressiveness and attitude. I'm working on this."

"Heather is a sweet young girl who has a lot of potential," notes her social worker at the therapeutic residence where Heather has lived for six months. "If she can get anger and aggressiveness under control, she can do great things. She is smart, helpful, a very likable young lady. She just has to believe (in herself)."

Her adoption worker adds, "Heather is very sweet, eager to share and wants a family."

Might you consider adoption and being the family Heather needs? Please talk with Bonnie Powers at Wayne County Department of Human Services, (313) 396-0394.

Last column's child: Anthony, 12, is a talkative, friendly, likable boy with special needs. For more information, call Christine Carotenuto at Lutheran Adoption Service, (248) 423-2770, ext. 1116.

A child is waiting appears Tuesdays in Features.

EDITORIALS

Smart Sentences

Give juvenile offenders a chance for parole

Detroit Free Press

April 25, 2006

A bill to reform Michigan's notorious juvenile lifer law has been locked up for nearly four months in the Senate Judiciary Committee, where it could quietly die. That would be a shame, because the proposal, sponsored by Sen. Liz Brater, D-Ann Arbor, is in line not only with science, common sense and legal tradition, but also with public opinion in Michigan.

A recently released survey by the Wayne State University School of Social Work and Center for Urban Studies found that, when given alternatives, only 5% of state residents support current practices of forcing judges to give some kids as young as 14 life without possibility of parole -- the maximum adult penalty for convictions in first-degree murder cases.

Teenagers, as parents know and brain-imaging research shows, are more impulsive and unstable than adults, even without the abuse and neglect that many young offenders have faced growing up. Juveniles don't have the same legal rights and responsibilities as adults because they lack the maturity and judgment to handle them. Nor should they generally pay the same consequences for crimes. That's partly why a conservative U.S. Supreme Court threw out the death penalty for juveniles.

In Michigan, more than 300 juveniles have been sentenced to life without parole - one of the highest numbers in the nation. Brater's bill, supported by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, would give them a chance at parole after they serve at least 15 years.

The WSU survey showed that, without question, Michigan residents believe young offenders should be held accountable for violent crimes. But they also believe sentences must consider the emotional and psychological maturity of teenagers. That view is consistent with science and evolving court decisions, and it ought to be consistent with Michigan law.

Brater's bill deserves a hearing.

Domestic squabble fuels double fatal

By John Michalak

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: April 25, 2006

Man shoots wife, father-in-law, then himself over home ownership

TROY -- Shootings that left two men dead and a woman injured on Custer Sunday night stemmed from a family argument over the ownership of the family house, police said.

Troy Lt. Gerry Scherlinck said investigators determined a 48-year-old man residing at the house in the 2200 block of Custer, northeast of John R and Long Lake, shot and killed his father-in-law, 71, of Madison Heights, shot and wounded his wife, 38, and then turned the gun on himself, committing suicide.

While police declined to identify the dead, the Daily Tribune learned they are Haoran R. Zhang, 48, and Han Huang, 71. Both died of gunshot wounds, an Oakland County Medical Examiner spokesperson said.

The Madison Heights man's wife, 68, and the younger couple's two boys, 5 and 8, were at the house, but weren't harmed, Scherlinck said.

"There was a heated argument over who owned the house," said Scherlinck. "During the course of that argument he went upstairs and got a gun. He shot his wife, then his father-in-law and then himself."

Scherlinck said it appears the shootings occurred as the killer descended the stairway. The shooter also didn't target other family members, said Scherlinck, adding more than three shots were fired.

"The argument was between (the shooter) and his wife and father-in-law over property ownership of the house," Scherlinck said. "The exact nature or direction of the argument is unclear. But in the heat of the argument that shooting occurred."

Scherlinck said investigators also believe there had been previous "friction" among family members, but nothing that had been reported to police.

"There appears to have been ongoing marital discord between (Zhang) and his wife and

corresponding discord between him and his wife's parents," Scherlinck said.

Police recovered a 9 mm handgun in the dead Troy man's possession, Scherlinck said. The gun was registered to the man, who was an engineer and had no criminal history, he added.

Police initially got a 911 call from the house as the mother-in-law and an 8-year-old child fled the house. The two went to a nearby house telling a neighbor what had happened. The neighbor went to the house and found the two men dead and the woman injured and called 911, Scherlinck said. Police found the 5-year-old boy in the basement, he added. Both boys attend city schools.

The younger couple had been married about 10 years and the in-laws were visiting the house at the time of the shootings, Scherlinck said.

Contact John Michalak at john.michalak@dailytribune.com or 248-591-2521.

New clinic helps rape victims Wayne County facility provides comfort, controlled environment for collecting evidence.

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

April 25, 2006

DETROIT -- For the victim of a sexual assault, a visit to the emergency room can be so painful -- not just physically, but emotionally -- that she may shun medical treatment.

A new clinic at St. John Health System's Connor Creek Village campus aims to make sexual assault examinations more comfortable for patients while providing prosecutors more complete and better-preserved evidence.

The Wayne County SAFE (Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner) clinic is the county's first medical facility dedicated to treating rape victims.

The clinic has treated 40 victims since it opened in January.

Clinic Director Kimberly Hurst said she expects the volume of patients to increase dramatically once local police and emergency personnel and members of the public hear about it.

More than 5,500 sexual assaults occur in Michigan each year, and about 20 percent of those crimes occur in Wayne County, Hurst said.

About 60 percent of sexual assaults committed in Wayne County occur in Detroit, she added.

"The need here is just tremendous," said Hurst, who is a physician's assistant with a background in emergency medical treatment.

"We have 5-6 percent more sexual assault cases reported to the (Michigan) State Police than either Oakland County or Macomb County."

The clinic adjoins the emergency room area at St. John's Connor Creek Village. It provides privacy for patients who otherwise might have to lay on a gurney in an emergency room, with nothing more than a curtain to separate them from other patients.

SAFE is staffed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by nurses who have received about 100 hours of forensic training.

The nurses have been trained in examination techniques to detect injuries that might ordinarily be missed by emergency personnel.

The examination room includes special digital cameras for photographing injuries specialized testing equipment, and locked refrigerators for storing forensic evidence.

"Our patients were having to go outside the county to get these services," Hurst said, noting that Oakland County has a similar facility.

"We provide the sexual assault medical treatment and assessment, collect the evidence and testify in court."

In addition to forensic training, the nurses are prepared to help patients deal with the trauma of the crimes they have endured, according to Kristine McGregor, one of the clinic's forensic nurses.

Often, emergency room personnel just don't understand what victims have been through, McGregor said.

Nurses at the clinic know how to provide emotional support. They arrange for follow-up counseling, and make sure the patients have a safe ride home.

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Privacy and comfort

The Wayne County SAFE clinic provides medical treatment and support for victims of sexual assault; specially trained nurses collect evidence to be used in prosecuting the rapist.

- The clinic is for victims over age 13, who live in Wayne County, and are willing to consider prosecuting the abuser.
- It is located next to the emergency room at St. John's Connor Creek Village, 4777 E. Outer Drive, Detroit; open 24-7.
- For emergency information, call the clinic pager at (313) 430-8000.

Trial about to begin in woman's death at Benzie County resort

Police say husband
pushed wife off
12-foot-high deck

LSJ
4/23 By JOHN FLESHER 4B
Associated Press

Their marriage crumbling, Mark and Florence Unger left their suburban Detroit home for a weekend at a northern Michigan resort with their two sons.

They arrived Oct. 24, 2003. The next morning, Florence Unger's lifeless body was found floating at the shallow edge of Lower Herring Lake.

On Wednesday, Mark Unger goes on trial in Benzie County Circuit Court, charged with first-degree murder. Police contend he pushed



Unger

his 37-year-old wife from a deck to a concrete slab 12 feet below, then dragged her — unconscious but alive — into the water, where she drowned.

Mark Unger, 45, of Huntington Woods, has pleaded not guilty. His attorneys say he loved his wife and her death was an accident. Unger has been held in the county jail since his bond was revoked last month.

With no eyewitnesses, prosecutors will build their case on circumstantial evidence, including testimony from forensic pathologists, police investigators and friends of Florence Unger.

Donna Pendergast of the state attorney general's office, who is leading the prosecution, said she is confident the evidence is enough to prove Unger's guilt.

Defense attorney Robert Harrison said the government's case is weak: "No eyewitnesses, no confession, no fingerprints."

Timeline

- Oct. 25, 2003: Florence Unger found dead at Watervale Resort in Benzie County.
- May 20, 2004: State attorney general's office charges Mark Unger with first-degree murder.
- July 6, 2004: Preliminary hearing begins.
- Sept. 8, 2004: Medical examiners agree Florence Unger's death was homicide but disagree about its cause.
- Oct. 15, 2004: District judge throws out testimony of Dr. L.J. Dragovic, who supports prosecution theory that the cause of death was drowning.
- July 7, 2005: District judge rules evidence is sufficient to try Unger on second-degree murder charge.
- March 10, 2006: Circuit judge reinstates first-degree murder charge, rules Dragovic can testify at trial and revokes Unger's bond.
- April 26, 2006: Unger's murder trial is scheduled to begin.

An outline of the prosecution's strategy took shape during a preliminary hearing that lasted a year.

Witnesses testified that Florence Unger had become increasingly concerned about her husband's mood swings.

Florence Unger decided to get divorced but wanted to stay on good terms with her husband for the sake of their children, while Mark Unger fought the divorce, they said.

Another friend said Florence Unger told her the day the family headed north that she and Mark had been "warring all week."

Police said Mark Unger told them the family had dinner, and afterward he and Florence walked onto a deck atop a boat-house overlooking the lake.

Unger said he eventually returned to the house to check on their children and when he returned, his wife was gone.

Ex-state worker admits to scam

Tuesday, April 25, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS --

A former state worker pleaded guilty Monday to fraud-related charges after being accused of funneling state funds to a neighbor trying to buy her Rockford house. Jennifer Dells, 24, faces up to 10 years in prison when sentenced June 12 by Kent County Circuit Judge Dennis Kolenda. Authorities say Dells sent \$6,500 in state money to Jeff Kaminski and Amy McConnell to cover closing costs, a down payment and home insurance on Dells' home. State officials said no such program existed, and the buyers were unaware of the alleged scam. The state said Dells, who worked for the **Department of Human Services**, called her neighbors and told them about the fictitious program.

Apr 25, 12:21 PM EDT

Republicans push for changes in welfare

By TIM MARTIN
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- House Republicans are again pushing for changes in the state's welfare system.

The plan announced Tuesday would prevent able-bodied welfare recipients from getting benefits for more than two consecutive years or more than four years combined in their lifetime. Recipients would get more assistance with education and finding jobs in an effort to help them become self-sufficient.

Recipients would lose some of their benefits if they don't fulfill work or training requirements. Welfare applicants could be drug tested if there are indications of substance abuse.

The plan comes about four months after Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm vetoed some similar measures passed by the state Legislature. This year's GOP plan has some differences, but many of its main features have similar themes.

"The system has long been due for an overhaul," said Rep. Rick Shaffer, R-Three Rivers.

Michigan is one of the few states that does not have a limit on how long a welfare recipient can receive assistance, Republican lawmakers said. The federal government has a five-year limit but allows states to have a portion of the population continue to receive benefits for a longer period.

On the Net:

Michigan Legislature: <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/>

© 2006 The Associated Press.